

House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my strong opposition and disappointment with the Bush administration's decision to end the United States participation in the World Conference Against Racism and not to even send initially Secretary of State Colin Powell to represent our interests.

Once again, the United States is on the wrong side of history. I traveled to South Africa to participate in the World Conference Against Racism as a congressional adviser, along with several of my colleagues with the Congressional Black Caucus.

Prior to attending the conference, I joined my colleagues in urging the Bush administration to send a high-level delegation led by Secretary of State Colin Powell.

As we all know, the decision of the United States to not participate in the conference was based on language in the draft document that would have resurrected the controversial debate of Zionism equals racism. Why then, on such an important issue, was the Secretary of State prevented from making every effort, and I mean every effort, to get rid of this destructive language? He should have been there doing that.

I am totally convinced that the United States should have been represented by Secretary Powell because he is well respected, very bright, and probably would have been able to help the conference move forward by insisting that it stay focused on its purpose, the elimination of racism, rather than the Middle East crisis, which warrants our full attention in trying to get the peace process back on track.

America should have asserted its leadership by fully engaging in the world conference against racism, not by detaching from it.

It is an outrageous insult to millions of Americans that our first African American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was not allowed to join in this important discussion. Many Americans are equally and rightfully outraged by the Bush administration's decision.

We know, I know, this House knows, that this country has a long history embedded in racism. Full participation in the conference would have sent a message that the United States was joining the world in efforts to discuss strategies to eliminate racism, xenophobia, sexism, hate crimes, religious intolerance, and other forms of intolerance. No other country has this tragic history as we do. Who else should be leading the world community in addressing this? We should.

However, the manner in which the United States has addressed the World Conference Against Racism is really a disgrace. It is a slap in the face to millions of Americans who have been affected by past United States policies

rooted in racist ideology and are dealing with the consequences each and every day in their daily lives.

The United States is sending a message that it is indifferent to the issues of circumstances facing Native Americans, Latino and Hispanic Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, as well as African Americans. I firmly believe that this is a grave mistake and a missed opportunity of the greatest magnitude.

The World Conference Against Racism provided an important and credible platform to address racism in all its forms. This platform is also critical to the discussion of the 10 priority action points of consensus presented by the Africans and African descendants at the conference, and should have been embraced by the conference and by the United States Government.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD this statement on the Ten Priority Action Points.

The document referred to is as follows:

TEN PRIORITY ACTION POINTS OF CONSENSUS
AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DESCENDANTS CAUCUS

1. The Slave Trade, Slavery and colonialism are crimes against humanity.
2. Reparations for Africans and African Descendants.
3. Recognition of the economic basis of racism.
4. Adoption of corrective national (domestic) public policies with emphasis on environmental racism and health care.
5. Adoption of culture-specific development policies.
6. The adoption of mechanisms to combat the interconnection of race and poverty, and the role that globalization (caused by governments and the private sector) has in this interconnection.
7. Adoption of mechanisms to combat racism in the criminal punishment (penal) system.
8. Reform of the legal system including national constitutional reforms and development of international and regional mechanisms for dismantling racism.
9. Adoption of policies specific to African and African Descendant Women that recognize and address the intersection of race and gender.
10. Support for the adoption of policies that recognize and address the intersection of race and sexual orientation.

Mr. Speaker, the United States Government sanctioned slavery for hundreds of years, completely devastating the lives of generations and generations of Africans in America. It is long past time that this government formally deal with its participation in the institution of slavery and to begin the healing process for millions of Americans who are descendants of slaves.

The United States should be leading the charge to address the lasting impact of the transatlantic slave trade, what to do about it, and specifically to discuss reparations. We cannot forget that America's racism is rooted in the institution of slavery. That must be dealt with in order to move forward as a healed and healthy country.

As an African American woman and a Member of Congress, it is embarrassing

that this miscalculated and callous decision to abandon the conference will once again leave the United States out of serious international dialogue.

Racism is a fundamental question of human rights, and in the House Committee on International Relations and here on the floor we regularly question human rights practices in other countries. It is equally important that we apply the same scrutiny to our own society and examine the easily recognizable vestiges of slavery manifested in the current racial and economic divides that we experience today.

The World Conference Against Racism provided our government with a credible platform to do this. Yet once again, as with the previous two conferences, we are absent.

I want to urge my colleagues to support legislation offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS), H.R. 40, which would commission a study to examine the effects of slavery and to begin a substantive discussion which I believe will move us forward toward healing our Nation. This legislation must move forward.

Again, let me reiterate my deep disappointment at the decision of the administration to pull out of this conference. The next time this opportunity presents itself, the United States not only needs to attend this conference, but to host it.

U.N. CONFERENCE AGAINST
RACISM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I attended the conference in Durbin on racism with the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE). The Congressional Black Caucus had seven members there, and I think we were the ones that gave credibility to the United States, because I really feel that we missed an opportunity.

So I would like to read to this body my statement that was delivered while we were there in Durbin, South Africa, at the United Nations Conference on Racism, Xenophobia, and Other Intolerance, because I think it states the point.

"It is a distinct honor to participate with representatives from around the world who are joined in one common concern, and that is the elimination of the scourge of racism. No nobler intent can there be to express our support for eradicating this menace that has permeated our halls of justice, our halls and places of power, our board rooms, our schoolrooms, and our main streets.

I use as a frame of reference my own place of birth, the United States of America, which has failed to send a high-level delegation. So I have to say, shame, shame on America. You have